

The reforms introduced or proposed by Freycinet and Boulanger, reducing the term of service from five years to three and improving the armament, challenged the superiority of the German army, and on November 25, 1886, the German Minister of War presented a seven-year army bill increasing the troops by 41,000. The aged Moltke delivered a few pregnant sentences. "An *entente* with France has been mentioned. But while public opinion in France persists in demanding the restitution of two essentially German provinces, which Germany is firmly resolved not to cede, an *entente* is an impossibility." The bill was fiercely contested, but its backers found their strongest argument in the growing popularity of Boulanger, who retained his portfolio when Goblet succeeded Freycinet in December. Each side believed or pretended to believe that the other was meditating a sudden attack. In the words of the new Premier, the whole of Europe was living "on a footing of armed peace." An imprudent word," reported Herbette on January 4, 1887, "any suggestion of an *arriere-pensee* might decide Bismarck to try to crush us as a measure of precaution. But I am convinced we can round Cape Wrath if we are wise."

On January 11, Bismarck supported the Army Bill in one of the greatest of his speeches. Germany, he explained, belonged to what Metternich called satiated States, but all the Powers were busy preparing for an uncertain future. "Everyone asks, Is war coming? I do not believe that any statesman will deliberately apply the match to the gunpowder heaped up in every land. But the passions of the mob, the ambition of party leaders, misguided public opinion—these are the elements potentially stronger than the will of the rulers." Germany had declined to thwart Russian ambitions

in the Near
East and had tried to oblige France everywhere
except in
Albace-Lorraine. " We have no intention and no
reason to
attack her. I would never fight because I thought
a war might
be inevitable. I cannot see into the cards of
Providence. If
the French will keep the peace till we attack,
peace is assured
for ever. Do we want more French soil ? I was
not anxious to
take Metz. I have complete confidence in the
present French
Government. Goblet and Flourens are not the
men to make
war. If you could guarantee their continuance in
office, I
would say, Save your money. But the stirring of
the flames by
an active minority makes me anxious. We have
still to fear an
attack—whether in ten days or ten years I cannot
say. War is